The letter in the theatron

CHAPTER 13

The Letter in the *Theatron*: Epistolary Voice, Character, and Soul (and their Audience)*

Niels Gaul

> I received your most esteemed letter and read it not only on my own, but only initially on my own: having admired it I convened the council [*boule*] as a *theatron* for your letter. Many of those who did not sit on the council flowed in, too, in full knowledge of the reason for our convention; once your words were put forth some jumped, others paled, a third group blushed, and yet others stooped towards the ground.[1]

> We made a serious effort to have your letter read before as many people as you would wish … And this is just what happened. For the entire audience applauded and was full of admiration as the letter was read by its grandfather[2], who was unable to conceal his own pleasure as the *theatron* was shaken by applause and by praise for the sophist whose teaching turned you into such a great rhetor. But this made him blush so much that he was scarcely able to continue.[3]

These two quotes which span a millennium between them, with one taken from late antiquity and the other from the last decades of the Byzantine empire, testify to the importance of "literary *theatron*" (λογικὸν θέατρον) -- or "literary recital", as was recently suggested[4] -- in late Roman and Byzantine literary culture. A *theatron* in the present sense occasioned the performance of a rhetorical composition, frequently a letter, before an audience in a specific setting, often under the auspices of a high-ranking patron or patroness; the spectrum ranged from a friendly reading circle to competitive performances

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[1] Libanios, *Letters*, no. 1259, ed. Foerster, vol. 11, p. 333, l. 15 - p. 334, l. 2: ἔλαβον σου καὶ αὐτὸς τὴν πλείστου ἀξίαν ἐπιστολὴν καὶ ἀνέγνων οὐ μόνος, ἀλλὰ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον μόνος, θαυμάσας δὲ καὶ θέατρον καθίζω τοῖς γράμμασι τὴν βουλήν. πολλοὶ δὲ καὶ τῶν οὐ βουλευόντων ἐπέρρεον γνόντες, ἐφ' ὅτῳ γε συγκαθιζοίμεθα, δεικνυμένων δὲ τῶν γεγραμμένων οἱ μὲν ἐπήδων, οἱ δὲ ὠχρίων, οἱ δὲ ἠρυθρίων, οἱ δὲ εἰς γῆν ἔκυπτον. Discussed by Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, p. 210. Translations from the Greek are my own unless otherwise noted.

[2] The author's teacher; the author being the letter's father.

[3] Manuel II Palaiologos, *Letters*, no. 9, ed. and trans. Dennis, pp. 24-25, l. 1-9 (translation modified): ἐπὶ τοσούτων σοι τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἀναγνωσθῆναι σπουδὴν πεποιήμεθα ἐφ' ὅσων γε καὶ ἐβούλου· … ὃ καὶ ἐξέβη. τοσοῦτοι γὰρ αὐτὴν ἐκρότουν καὶ διὰ θαύματος ἦγον ὅσοιπερ ἀκηκόασιν ἀναγινωσκομένης παρὰ τοῦ ταύτης πάππου, ᾧ καὶ κρύπτειν μὲν τὴν ἡδονὴν οὐκ ἐξῆν τοῦ θεάτρου σειομένου καὶ εὐφημούντων τὸν σοφιστὴν παρ' ὃν φοιτῶν τοιόσδε ῥήτωρ γεγένησαι, ὑπὸ δὲ τοῦ ἄγαν ἐρυθριᾶν σχεδὸν χωρεῖν οὐχ οἷός τε ἦν. A hierarchy is likely to be implied from sophist, usually somewhat negatively connotated, to rhetor.

[4] Bourbouhakis, "Rhetoric and Performance", p. 181.

before the emperor. While such *theatra* retained ample theatricality and in many respects are the closest Byzantine equivalent of theatre, this chapter prefers to offer the term *theatron* in transliteration in order to differentiate such (public) readings of rhetoric from staged, scenic performances.[5] It briefly surveys the concept and practice of literary, or rhetorical, *theatron* before looking at "theatrical"[6] performances of letters more closely.

A Short History of the *Theatron*: Shifting Parameters of Performance

Rhetorical *theatron* emerged over the course of late antiquity; its rise was tied into highly competitive and mobile deuterosophistic performance culture.[7] As Eunapios remarked about Libanios, "in addition to his [public] orations he would confidently undertake and easily compose certain other works more suited towards 'theatrical' pleasure"[8]. Theatre buildings began housing rhetorical performances, particularly of the so-called *meletai* ("declamations") of the travelling sophists who, on the theatre stage, "through gesture and voice, almost imitated the dramatic action of a show: the reader could, therefore, turn into an actor sometimes"[9]. The term *theatron* was thence transferred to lecturing, teaching, and assembly halls in public buildings suitable for rhetorical performances, such as *odeia* (originally, rooms for musical performances or competitions) or, as in the opening quotation, Antioch's city hall (*bouleuterion*).[10] The latter possessed "a covered *theatron* and four colonnades, which surrounded a courtyard that had been turned into a garden" and featured different kinds of trees.[11] Thus, possibly, the string of limestone rooms recently discovered in ancient Alexandria, or those attested for fourth-century Berytos (Beirut) qualify the description:[12] commonly, there seems to have been a fixed chair (*thronos*) for the

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[5] For previous literature see, e.g., Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel I*, pp. 335-56; Cavallo, *Lire*, pp. 57-66 = *Leggere*, pp. 73-86; Bernard, *Writing and Reading*, pp. 96-101; Bourbouhakis, "Rhetoric and Performance"; Marciniak, "Byzantine *Theatron*"; and for the Palaiologan period Medvedev, "*Theatra* as Form of Communication", now superseded by Toth, "Rhetorical *Theatron*"; Ryder, *Demetrius Kydones*, pp. 137-38 or Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, pp. 17-53.

[6] Similarly, I place the adjective "theatrical" in quotation marks when referring to the Byzantine *theatron*.

[7] Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, pp. 23-40; Schmitz, *Wissen und Macht*, pp. 197-231.

[8] Eunapios, *Lives of the Philosophers* 16.2.7, ed. Giangrande, p. 84: καὶ παρὰ τοὺς λόγους ἕτερά τινα συντολμῆσαι καὶ ῥᾳδιουργῆσαι πρὸς τέρψιν θεατρικωτέραν; trans. Wright, pp. 525-27 (modified).

[9] Cavallo, "Places of Public Reading", p. 153; see also Schouler, "Sophistes et le théâtre", pp. 275-77; Connolly, "Reclaiming the Theatrical"; Capano, "Μελέτη come fenomeno teatrale pubblico".

[10] Korenjak, *Publikum und Redner*, pp. 27-33.

[11] Libanios, *Orations*, no. 22, § 31, ed. Foerster, vol. 2, p. 487, l. 15 - p. 488, l. 8: τοῦτ' αὐτοῖς τοῦ βουλευτηρίου μετέδωκεν, οὗ θέατρον ὑπωρόφιον, στοαὶ δὲ τέτταρες αὐλὴν αὑτῶν ἐν μέσῳ ποιοῦσαι εἰς κῆπον βεβιασμένην, ἀμπέλους ⟨ἔχοντα⟩, συκᾶς, δένδρα ἕτερα […]; trans. Cribiore, "Spaces for Teaching", p. 146. On the size of audiences Schmitz, *Wissen und Macht*, pp. 160-68; Korenjak, *Publikum und Redner*, pp. 42-46; Whitmarsh, *Second Sophistic*, p. 20.

[12] On the Kom el-Dikka rooms as auditoria see Derda/Markiewicz/Wipszycka, *Alexandria*, and especially Majcherek, "Late Roman Auditoria", and McKenzie, "Place in Late Antique Alexandria". However, not all archaeologists and ancient historians agree with this interpretation; I am grateful to my colleague, Prof. Judith Barringer, for sharing her observations. Multi-purpose use of these rooms -- as teaching and dining rooms -- is of

rhetor/*didaskalos* at the far wall opposite the entrance and rows of seats, one above the other, for the students along the walls. Apses held statues of Muses, heroes, poets, philosophers, sophists, and/or former students.[13] For the Kom el-Dikka complex, Bagnall proposes that there were reading stands in the middle of a few auditoria (if that is what they were).[14] Finally, the term denoted small *theatra* in the lodgings of deutero- and late antique sophists: Eunapios speaks of "private theatres" (ἰδιωτικὰ θέατρα).[15] Himerios exemplifies this transition, narratively performing his return from the *theatra* of the large cities to his own, small "*theatron* of the Muses", in which he had acquired, and was now teaching, rhetoric:

> Come, then, since I have met with you here again for rhetorical purposes after having contended in many great *theatra*, let me address this small one. O precinct of the Muses and of Hermes! O sacred and most lovely place, which first welcomed the fruits of my eloquence.[16]

There is no doubt that epistolography became closely tied into "theatrical" performance culture; most major letter collections of late antiquity make mention of this, such as in a well-known passage from the correspondence of Synesios:

> A man from Phykous … has brought me a letter with your name inscribed on it. I read it with pleasure and admiration: for it was worthy of the first through the friendly disposition of your soul; and the second through the beauty of your language. I therefore organized a Hellenic *theatron* in Libya,[17] and announced to them to come as listeners of an eloquent letter. And now Pylamenes, the creator of this divine letter, is [considered] great in our towns [i.e., the Pentapolis].[18]

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course also a possibility. Beirut's *auditoria legum*, destroyed in 525 according to Agathias (*History* 2.15.1-4, ed. Keydell, p. 59, l. 20-p. 60, l. 7), are mentioned in the anonymous mid-fourth century *Description of the Entire World* (ed. Woodman, p. 6, l. 110-12): *post ipsam Berytus, civitas valde deliciosa et auditoria legum habens, per quam omnia iudicia Romanorum stare videntur.*

[13] Cribiore, "Spaces for Teaching", p. 146-47 and ead., *School of Libanius*, p. 43-47.

[14] Bagnall, "Introduction", p. 4.

[15] Eunapios, *Lives of the Philosophers* 9.1.4-6, ed. Giangrande, p. 483; cf. Philostratos, *Lives of the Sophists* 604 = 2.21, ed. Stefec, p. 113, l. 7-13.

[16] Himerios, *Orations*, no. 64, ed. Colonna, p. 231, l. 24-29: φέρε οὖν ἐπειδὴ καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐν πολλοῖς καὶ μεγάλοις θεάτροις ἀθλήσαντες πάλιν ἐνταῦθα ἐπὶ τοὺς λόγους συνήλθομεν, τὸ μικρὸν τοῦτο προσείπωμεν θέατρον. ὦ Μουσῶν καὶ Ἑρμοῦ τέμαενος· ὦ χωρίον ἱερὸν καὶ κάλλιστον, καὶ τὰς ἡμετέρας τῶν λόγων ὠδῖνας πρῶτον δεξάμενον, trans. Penella, pp. 139-40 (modified); summarized by Cribiore, *School of Libanius,* p. 45.

[17] According to Cavallo, "Places of Public Reading", p. 153, the Πανελλήνιον mentioned in l. 73 refers to as specific building whereas Roques, *Synésios de Cyrène: Correspondance*, vol. 3, pp. 357-58, n. 37 assumes a literary circle in the Pentapolis. The latter seems more likely, see, e.g, Psellos, *Letters*, no. 223, eds. Kurtz/Drexl, p. 265, l. 23-25.

[18] Synesios, *Letters*, no. 101, ed. Garzya, trans. Roques, vol. 3, p. 224, l. 2-9: Φυκούντιος ἄνθρωπος … ἐπέδωκέ μοι φέρων ἐπιστολὴν τὸ σὸν ἐπιγεγραμμένην ὄνομα. ταύτην ἀνέγνων ἡδέως ἅμα καὶ ἀγαμένως·

Alternatively and in the absence of a formal *theatron*, a letter could be carried, by three friends of the addressee, "through the whole city" (πᾶσαν … τὴν πόλιν) and be shown "to those well-disposed" to the latter "and to those who are not".[19]

Rhetorical *theatra* are attested through the early sixth century but then seem to have fallen into oblivion during the period of transition from the polycentric cultural world of the late antique Roman empire to the Constantinopolicentric middle Byzantine empire.[20] It remains an open question to which degree, if at all, rhetorical performances between the end of late antiquity and the tenth/eleventh centuries, which certainly existed in the ecclesial sphere but otherwise, even at the emperor's court, at a considerably reduced scale,[21] were conceptualized as *theatra.* Occurrences of the term *theatron* during these centuries seem to denote almost exclusively the Constantinopolitan hippodrome -- the city had possessed at least four *theatra* before the fifth century[22] -- or mime plays, i.e., practices frowned upon by the church.[23] Down to the rule of Leo VI (r. 886-912) and beyond, homilies remained the predominant performative genre; there is certainly no mention of "theatrical" performances in the *Book of Ceremonies* with its otherwise fair share of theatrics. Epistolography of the ninth and tenth centuries remains generally silent with regard to its performative setup. There seems to be indirect evidence at best that letters were read to (small) audiences: in a rather politicized context, Theodore Stoudites collectively addressed groups of addressees and, on other occasions, turned to a second recipient mid-letter, apparently assuming the latter's presence on the scene.

The term *theatron* as a referent to recitals of letters and rhetorical compositions before an audience, appears to have fully resurfaced in the eleventh century. This reappearance and

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ὠφείλετο γὰρ τὸ μὲν τῇ διαθέσει τῆς ψυχῆς, τὸ δὲ τῷ κάλλει τῆς γλώττης. καὶ δῆτα παρεσκεύασά σοι θέατρον ἐπὶ Λιβύης Ἑλληνικόν, ἀπαγγείλας ἥκειν ἀκροασάμενοις ἐλλογίμων γραμμάτων. καὶ νῦν ἐν ταῖς παρ' ἡμῖν πόλεσιν ὁ Πυλαιμένης πολύς, ὁ δημιουργὸς τῆς θεσπεσίας ἐπιστολῆς: partially trans. Cameron, "Correspondence of Symmachus", pp. 88-89 (modified).

[19] Libanios, *Letters*, no. 1004 (to Symmachos), ed. Foerster, vol. 11, p. 133, l. 2-5 = *Letters*, no. 177, ed. and trans. Norman, vol. 2, p. 386: τοῖς ἡδέως ἔχουσι πρὸς ἡμᾶς δεικνύειν καὶ τοῖς οὐχ οὕτω; trans. Cameron, "Correspondence of Symmachus", pp. 89-90.

[20] Prokopios of Gaza, *Letters*, no. 91, ed. Amato, p. 368; Aeneas of Gaza, *Letters*, no. 16, ed. Massa Positano, p. 47; see also *Letters*, no. 7, p. 43, and Cavallo, "Places of Public Reading", pp. 153-54; Cameron, "Correspondence of Symmachus", p. 89.

[21] See Maxwell, *Christianization and Communication*, pp. 42-64; White, *Performing Orthodox Ritual*, pp. 58-61; Cunningham, "Dramatic Device". Generally on this shift, Cameron, "Byzantium and the Past in the Seventh Century". Magdalino, *Empire of Manuel I,* pp. 247-48 makes a strong case that before the mid-eleventh century, imperial orations were "short and underdeveloped".

[22] Malineau, "L'apport de l'Apologie", p. 161, n. 45.

[23] One transitory instance, that seems to herald the shift from spectacle to literary *theatron*, is attested in Constantine Sikeliotes' apologetic verses against those who accused him of calumniating against Leo the *mathematikos* after the latter's death (vv. 36-46, especially v. 41, ed. Spadaro, "Composizioni di Costantino il Filosofo", p. 201). For another early instance (901) see Arethas, *Dinner-table Oration for Epiphany*, ed. Westerink, p. 35, l. 15.

rise of "theatrical" practice was arguably tied into the emergence of a new, often provincial, town-based, "middling" stratum from roughly the tenth century onward, when the empire was expanding towards its medieval apex;[24] this time, the practice was to survive to the end of the Eastern Roman empire in the fifteenth century. For the sons of this social stratum, acquiring and performing *paideia* became one of the means, if not the most promising way, of advancing their careers. Unlike in late antiquity with its visible connection to theatre buildings and theatrical settings, the practice now metonymically provided the name for the apparently more flexible venues in which such gatherings were convened; as a matter of fact, in most cases we have no information as to the locality of a *theatron*. With time, all occasions that included the performance of rhetoric came to be perceived as "theatrical" one way or other, presumably including the famous boat trip up the Bosphorus culminating in verse and prose performances which the eleventh-century "Anonymous Sola" describes.[25] It is thus not always possible to distinguish between *theatra* and other kinds of reading circles to which the sources refer by various terms, such as *kyklos* (especially for the middle Byzantine period); *syllogos* (a more technical term often applied to gatherings of an official character); or *choros* (often denoting the circle of disciples around a distinguished teacher/scholar) .[26] In the absence of a more specific term, the phrase "in the middle" or "into the middle" provides a reliable indicator for a "theatrical" performance. This is exemplified by a passage from the very end of the Komnenian period, in Euthymios Tornikes' imperial oration to Emperor Alexios III Angelos (r. 1195-1203), which conveniently equates both:

> For my eagerness encourages this audacity, which prepared me rather to spend my time with imperial encomia -- for I love the autocrator and am well-disposed towards our lord and emperor -- and in famous and great *theatra* I certainly put on a performance and placed myself in the midst of all about to "commemorate to song" the emperor's achievements.[27]

By contrast, the phrase τὰ μέσα φεύγειν signals a withdrawal from public life.[28]

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[24] See Gaul, "Rising Elites and Institutionalization", pp. 243-58. I am presently working on a monographic treatment of the matter.

[25] Anononymous Sola, *Poem* I, vv. 34-39, ed. Sola, pp. 20-21; see also Lauxtermann, *Byzantine Poetry,* pp. 55-56 and Bernard, *Writing and Reading*, p. 99.

[26] Mullett, "Aristocracy and Patronage", p. 176.

[27] Euthymios Tornikes, *Orations*, no. 1, § 3, ed. Darrouzès, p. 58, l. 23-28: παραμυθεῖται γάρ μοι τὴν τόλμαν ταύτην τὸ πρόθυμον, ὅ με καὶ μᾶλλον τοῖς βασιλικοῖς ἐγκωμίοις -- εἰμὶ γάρ πως φιλαυτοκράτωρ καὶ περὶ τὸν ἡμέτερον δεσπότην καὶ βασιλέα εὐνοϊκός -- ἐνευκαιρεῖν παρεσκεύασε, καὶ θεάτροις οὕτω δὴ λαμπροῖς καὶ μεγάλοις ἐνθεατρίζομαι καὶ μέσος ἕστηκα πάντων, τοῦ βασιλέως ὑμνηγορήσων τὰ κατορθώματα; partially trans. Bourbouhakis, "Rhetoric and Performance", p. 181 (modified).

[28] John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 5, ed. Karpozilos, p. 51, l. 3: ἡμᾶς […] τὰ μέσα φεύγειν ἐσπουδακότας. This shortcut for "public life" and, more specifically, participation in "theatrical" performances hails back to phrases like Plato's more extensive (*Gorgias*, 485d) φεύγοντι τὰ μέσα τῆς πόλεως καὶ τὰς ἀγοράς, ἐν αἷς ἔφη ὁ ποιητὴς τοὺς ἄνδρας ἀριπρεπεῖς γίγνεσθαι, who in turn evokes *Il.* 9, 441.

While by and large the structure and virtual hierarchy of *theatra* seem to have consolidated over time, such gatherings could also be convened on the spur of the moment, formed ad hoc of those assembled for various purposes in the house of a friend, patron or magnate, or in the imperial palace, if the occasion arose upon the reception of a letter. Such ad hoc events allow the practice to be tied into notions of patronage, networking, and, most importantly, everyday exchanges and politics, and open the possibility of a more flexible system in which a *theatron* consisted of those accidentally, or not so accidentally ("clientele"), present, as is seen in the following example:

> Just at that time when your letter arrived most of the learned gentlemen [of Constantinople] were, perchance, assembled in my house, who were astonished when listening to the nobility of mind innate to your letter; then the beauty of its composition and the grace and wit following your character, and they praised the city of the Thessalonians to no small measure of her possession, [saying that] you are her only learned treasure and the best whetstone among the learned tongues of that city with regard to rhetorical performance. And we too were delighted to no small measure because you did not fail our hopes, but granted us to find a friend capable in all respects and more excellent than anyone could have hoped.[29]

The Letter in the *Theatron*: Performance and Patronage

Letters lent themselves to such "theatrical" performance:[30] they were "intimate and confidential and intended for publication",[31] i.e., circulating both orally and in writing.[32] While in the fourth century Libanios had still feigned unease at the very practices which he had no qualms to inflict on others,[33] post-tenth century Byzantine letters that came to be transferred into manuscripts and thus preserved for posterity were usually conceived from the start with a "theatrical" audience in mind. In this second part, this chapter traces the letter's fate once it came to the *theatron*, as it were, and looks at four aspects in particular: How was the letter given a voice?[34] What did audiences expect to encounter in a letter thus

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[29] Nikephoros Gregoras, *Letters*, no. 142 (to Thomas Magistros), ed. Leone, vol. 2, p. 348, l. 10-18: ἔτυχον γὰρ ἡμῖν καὶ τῶν ἐλλογίμων τηνικαῦτα παρακαταθήμενοι πλεῖστοι, οἳ δὴ καὶ τεθαυμάκασιν ἀκηκοότες τὴν τοῖς γράμμασιν ἐγκειμένην τῆς διανοίας εὐγένειαν, τότε τῆς συνθήκης κάλλος καὶ τὴν τῷ ἤθει ἐφέρπουσαν χάριν καὶ ἀστειότητα, καὶ ἐμακάρισαν οὐ μετρίως τὴν Θεσσαλονικέων τοῦ κτήματος· σὲ γὰρ εἶναι καὶ μόνον τὸν λογικὸν αὐτῆς ὀφθαλμὸν καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸ λέγειν ἀρίστην ἀκόνην τῶν ἐλλογίμων ταύτης γλωσσῶν. ἥσθημεν δὲ καὶ ἡμεῖς οὐ μετρίως ὅτι τῶν ἐλπίδων ἡμᾶς οὐκ ἔψευσας, ἀλλ᾽ ἔδωκας φίλου τυχεῖν ἀγαθοῦ τὰ πάντα καὶ κρείττονος ἢ κατὰ τὰς ἐλπίδας. Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, pp. 45-46.

[30] Hunger, *Hochsprachliche profane Literatur*, vol. 1, pp. 210-12; more recently Papaioannou, "Letter-writing", p. 192.

[31] Morey/Brooke, *Gilbert Foliot*, p. 13, cited in Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 16. The moment of performance in the *theatron* was, of course, just one moment in the wider context of ritualized communication; see Chapter 11 in this volume.

[32] On these processes see also Chapter 17 in this volume.

[33] Cameron, "Correspondence of Symmachus", p. 89.

[34] Gaul, "Voicing and Gesturing Emotions".

"voiced"? Which reaction was expected from the audience? And to what degree, finally, was all this influenced by social hierarchy?

Among the many genres of Byzantine rhetoric geared towards performance, the letter occupies a special position. It was the only genre which depended on an "alien" voice to fully realize its rhetorical potential in performance: be this the voice of its carrier, its addressee, or a reader appointed by the latter. In most other cases an "author-orator"[35] could trust that he would bring his own script to life at least during an inaugural performance -- oral "publishing", as it were -- although on later occasions these, too, circulated beyond the author's control. At the same time, the author of a letter was not directly exposed to the addressee's and audience's reaction, but only indirectly so, usually in form of written "feedback". This "alienation" could of course be quietly glossed over; in an oft-quoted passage Michael Italikos put emphasis on the acoustic beauty of a letter, and -- assigning a merely auxiliary function to its herald (*keryx*) -- ascribed its voice (*phthongos*) and melody (*melos*) exclusively to the (absent) author:

> When your letter was given to the *logikon theatron* and unfolded, it gave forth a voice and melody -- o Logoi, Muse, and refined rhetoric -- such that I cannot describe its force or quality: how it sang, how it delighted, how it caused inspiration through pleasure. If not the temperance of its melody, the steadiness of its rhythm and the fairness of its diction had restrained us, we should all have been filled with enthusiasm, both the letter's proclaimer and those who listened to its proclamation.[36]

Italikos suggested that the "voice" filling the *theatron* was the author's, rather than the performer's, song. It charmed even this "herald" whose performance skills seemingly made no difference to the letter's success. A century earlier, and less diplomatically, Michael Psellos had explicitly addressed this "dilemma" of a borrowed voice when writing to his relative Pothos:

> For your letter was handed to me in the evening hours, and the timing did not permit me to approach the emperor's palace. At first light I immediately made my way with animate and just spirit about you to the ruler. And just as the rhetors in Athens urged those having dealings with the magistrates [to do so] first about issues of their choosing, in this manner I, too, implored the emperor about your letter first. And immediately by agreement many supported me in this matter and the

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[35] Bourbouhakis, "Rhetoric and Performance", p. 176.

[36] Michael Italikos, *Letters*, no. 17, ed. Gautier, p. 154, l. 8-14: εἰς γὰρ λογικὸν θέατρον δοθεῖσα ἡ ἐπιστολὴ καὶ ἀνελιχθεῖσα φθόγγον ἀφῆκε καὶ μέλος, ὦ λόγοι καὶ Μοῦσα καὶ ῥητορεία κομψή, οὐκ οἶδα ὁπόσον καὶ οἷον, ὡς ἦσεν, ὡς ὤνησεν, ὡς ἔνθους ὑφ' ἡδονῆς ἀπειργάσατο. εἰ δὲ μὴ κατεῖχε τὸ σῶφρον τοῦ μέλους καὶ τὸ στάσιμον τοῦ ῥυθμοῦ καὶ τὸ εὐπρεπὲς τῆς λέξεως κορυβάντων ἂν ἐνεπλήσθημεν καὶ ὁ τοῦ γράμματος κῆρυξ καὶ οἱ τῶν κηρυγμάτων ἀκροαταί. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for prompting a fresh look at this passage, which is also translated in Mullett, "Aristocracy and Patronage", p. 175 and Bourbouhakis, "Rhetoric and Performance", pp. 180-81, and suggesting an elegant solution.

> introducer of your letter[37] read your letter to the emperor. The groups on both sides of the imperial dais chimed in regarding your affairs, each with something else, following me as if I was the leader of a tragical discourse, because I played up to your plight, acting the drama in voice more beautifully than you, the writer, did in your letter, going through all your misfortunes in precise detail and with much emotion.[38]

Unlike Italikos, Psellos claimed greater effect for his own performance as well as choreography -- which made Pothos's uncle, a *droungarios*, publicly burst into tears -- than he was prepared to ascribe to the author's epistolary voice. While the two passages seem to espouse a remarkably different attitude to the relevance of the author's vs. the performer's voice, this is most likely due to underlying issues of social hierarchy: Italikos is writing to the "most divine *kaisar*" (θειότατε καῖσαρ, l. 1) Nikephoros Bryennios, and is keen on flattering the latter and thus has no interest in differentiating between the author's and the performer's voice, whereas Psellos was intent on emphasizing his own role in Pothos's improved fortunes.

Finally, one needs to allow for an altogether different scenario. While in the preceding examples the public recitation of the letter constituted the highlight of the *theatron*, occasionally the *grammatephoros, komistes* or, as Psellos called it above, *grammatoeisagogeus* could literally steal the show, as John Mauropous reports, with his tongue in his cheek:

> "A candle at high noon" is as superfluous as irrigation from a well is superfluous in the middle of winter and letters are equally superfluous when the carrier is a loquacious and talkative fellow. The truth of this statement will be clearly attested by this messenger, because the letters he brings will no longer have a chance to talk, once he begins to speak of his own affairs at length. Therefore, set aside these voiceless syllables [i.e., the letter] to receive the living voice and lend your ears completely to this marvelous orator so that you may not waste so much water in vain, seeing that it is summer season and the heat that hangs over us becomes stifling and the use of water is indispensable for everything -- if indeed he would prefer to

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[37] The reader might be whoever had initially carried Pothos's letter (as Jeffreys/Lauxtermann, *Letters of Michael Psellos,* p. 187 suggest) or Psellos himself, referring to himself in the third person, as the anonymous reviewer suggests.

[38] Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 41, eds. Kurtz/Drexl, p. 67, l. 25 - p. 68, l. 12: ἐσπέρας μὲν γὰρ τὸ σὸν γράμμα ἐνεχειρίσθη μοι καὶ ὁ καιρὸς οὐκ ἐδίδου τὴν εἰς τὰ βασίλεια ἄφιξιν. οὔπω δὲ ἕως ὑπέφαινε, καὶ ἡμεῖς αὐτίκα ἐμψύχῳ καὶ δικαίῳ θυμῷ περὶ σοῦ ἐς τὸν κρατοῦντα ἐξιππασάμεθα. καὶ ὥσπερ οἱ Ἀθήνησι ῥήτορες τοῖς πρυτάνεσι, περὶ ὧν αὐτοὶ προήρηνται, πρώτως χρηματίζοντας προὔτρεπον, οὕτω δὲ κἀγώ σοι τῷ βασιλεῖ περὶ πρώτου τοῦ σοῦ ἐδεόμην γράμματος. καὶ αὐτίκα πολλοὶ ἐκ συνθήματος εἰς τὸ αὐτό μοι συνεκπεπνεύκεσαν καὶ ὁ μὲν γραμματοεισαγωγεὺς τὸ πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα σου γράμμα ὑπανεγίνωσκεν, αἱ δ' ἐφ' ἑκάτερα μερίδες τοῦ βασιλείου βήματος ἄλλος ἄλλο τι τῶν περὶ σοῦ συνεφόρει ἐμοὶ καθάπερ ἡγεμόνι τῆς τραγικῆς ἑπόμενοι διαλέξεως, ἐπεὶ καὶ ἀκριβῶς ὑπετραγῴδησά σοι τὸ πάθος κάλλιον ἐν γλώττῃ τὸ δρᾶμα ὑποκριθεὶς ἢ σὺ ὁ γράψας ἐν γράμμασι καὶ πάντα σοι τὰ συμβεβηκότα ἐπιδραμὼν ἀκριβῶς καὶ περιπαθῶς. On this letter see now Jeffreys/Lauxtermann, *Letters of Michael Psellos,* pp. 186-87. Part of this passage is also translated and discussed Chapter 11 (at n. 104) of this volume.

> speak by the water-clock rather than to speak with wine [in the water-clock]. Let him commence his usual long speech; as for me, having extended my letter to this point, I hand over the rest to the flowing force of his tongue.[39]

While this took Psellos's insistence on the significance of live performance to the ultimate level, a passage in a letter Nikephoros Choumnos sent to the *protasekretis* Leo Bardales shifts emphasis to a related yet different concept:

> I received the letter which you sent to us, who had asked for it, not so much for reasons of necessity as of ambition [i.e., in order to show off]. For it knew to show forth every aspect of beauty. I for one did not know which of its features to praise first, or rather, which above all other: the easy flow of thoughts so cleverly organized and all appearing equally admirable? The harmony and precision of expression? The rhythm? Or composition before rhythm? Or above all else that which caught me more than everything, the beauty of its character [*ethos*], creating the letter with a soul, as it were, so that you did not seem to lead the conversation with paper and ink but in person, communicating with your living voice.[40]

This passage brings epistolary representation of rhetorical character (*ethos*, or *tropoi*) to the fore,[41] which from the eleventh century onwards regained a significant role. Again Psellos is our most outspoken witness, who perceived the court, the capital and its various *theatra* as a stage on which to perform -- literally as an actor (*tragodos*) -- and display one's *ethos*, and whose project was thus somewhat exceptional.[42] Yet the notion was more widespread, as is testified in John Mauropous's "this letter bears witness to the character of

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[39] John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 2, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, pp. 44-47: περιττὸν μὲν λύχνος ἐν μεσημβρίᾳ, περιττὴ δὲ μέσου χειμῶνος ἡ ἐκ φρεάτων ἀρδεία, περιττὰ δὲ τὰ γράμματα πολυφώνου καὶ λάλου τυχόντα τοῦ κομιστοῦ. ὅτι δ' ἀληθῆ τὰ τῆς γνώμης, μαρτυρήσει σαφῶς ὁ τοῖς παροῦσι διακονῶν· οὐκέτι γὰρ χώρα παρρησίας αὐτοῖς, ἐπειδὰν οὗτος ἄρξηται μακρηγορεῖν τὰ οἰκεῖα. τῶν ἀφώνων οὖν τούτων ἀποστὰς συλλαβῶν, τὰς ἐμψύχους δέχου φωνάς, καὶ τῷ θαυμαστῷ δημηγόρῳ τὰς ἀκοὰς ὅλας δίδου, ὡς μὴ μάτην τοσοῦτον ἀναλίσκοις τὸ ὕδωρ. θέρους ὥρᾳ, καὶ ταῦτα καὶ τοσούτου πνίγους ἐπικειμένου, ὅταν ἡ τοῦ ὕδατος χρῆσις ἀναγκαιοτάτη πρὸς ἅπαντα, εἴγε δὴ καὶ πρὸς ὕδωρ, ἀλλὰ μὴ μᾶλλον πρὸς οἶνον δημηγορεῖν αὐτὸς ἔλοιτο. ὁ μὲν οὖν ἀρχέσθω τῆς συνήθους μακρολογίας, ἡμεῖς δ' ἄχρι τούτου τὴν γραφὴν παρατείναντες τὸ ἐντεῦθεν τῇ ῥύμῃ τῆς ἐκείνου γλώττης παραχωροῦμεν.

[40] Nikephoros Choumnos, *Letters*, no. 78, l. 4-15, ed. Boissonade, pp. 94-95: τὴν ἐπιστολὴν δεξάμενος, ἣν οὐ κατὰ χρείαν μᾶλλον ἢ φιλοτιμίαν αἰτησαμένοις ἡμῖν ἔπεμψας. εἶχε γὰρ, ὡς ἐν βραχεῖ φάναι, καλῶν εἶδος ἅπαν ἐν ἑαυτῇ δεικνῦσα· κἀγὼ δ᾽ οὐκ εἶχον ὅτι πρῶτον ἢ μάλιστα τῶν αὐτῆς ἐπαινέσομαι, πότερον τὴν τῶν νοημάτων εὐπορίαν οὕτω πυκνῶν καὶ θαυμαστῶν πάντων ὁμοίως φαινομένων, ἢ τὴν ἁρμονίαν ἢ τὴν ἀκρίβειαν τῶν ὀνομάτων, ἢ τὸν ῥυθμόν, ἢ πρὸ τοῦ ῥυθμοῦ τὴν συνθήκην, ἢ πρὸ τῶν ἄλλων πάντων, ὅ με καὶ πλέον τῶν ἄλλων εἶλε, *τὸ τοῦ ἤθους καλόν*, ἔμπνουν, ὡς εἰπεῖν, τὴν ἐπιστολὴν ἐργαζόμενον, ὡς μηδ᾽ ἐν χάρτῃ σε δοκεῖν μᾶλλον καὶ μέλανι τὴν ὁμιλίαν, ἀλλ᾽ αὐτοπρόσωπον ποιεῖσθαι, ζώσῃ φωνῇ προσδιαλεγόμενον.

[41] For more detail see Chapter 12 in this volume; see also Gregoras's passage above at n. 29.

[42] Although in *Letters*, nos. 27 and 224, eds. Kurtz/Drexl, he opted to "refuse the demands of spectacle of theater and resist this type of mimesis" (Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, p. 108).

your friend".[43] It can be traced through the contemporary revival of rhetorical theory, and back to antiquity.[44] Such "character" amounts to more than the Hermogenian figure of *ethos*; hailing back to Aristotle, it rather refers to a befitting underlying image of the author's character (μίμησις ἤθους ὑποκειμένου προσώπου, in Aphthonios's phrasing; συμμορφάζεσθαι γὰρ ἀνάγκη τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις προσώποις, as John Sikeliotes put it, or, in Maximos Planoudes' words, ἦθος τὸ ἁρμόττον τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ προσώπῳ) geared towards public display and matched to the situation, thus lending plausibility to his words.[45] The practice was related to the progymnasmatic practice of *ethopoiia* ("performance of character"), which trained students to stay in role when pretending to speak from the viewpoint of a (fictional) character, allowing for "animated", i.e., *empsychos*, performance of character.[46] The advice Psellos sent to his friend and former teacher, Mauropous, when the latter hoped to return from (honorary) exile in Euchaita, are remarkable in their emphasis on the situational display of *ethos* in both writing as well as physical enactment:

> I do not know if I by myself am the reason for receiving such letters from you, my holy head, or if you and your *ethos* have changed under the [recent] difficulties. … For I have never encountered any man, especially among those practicing philosophy, who, with regard to his *ethos*, is like you august at the same time as Socratic, and not too common or solely ironic, but mixed from both and most balanced with regard to the harmony of the soul … But you who have come here and who is present on the imperial dais, rein in your frown and change your *ethos* and do not make threats, that you are upset and ready to abandon your metropolis, and demands the premises of your words … You see how far away from the stage[47] I, the tragedian,[48] shape and form you as I fear that you will somehow enter [into the

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[43] John Mauropous, *Letters*, no. 42, ed. and trans. Karpozilos, p. 136-37: μαρτυρεῖ σοι γοῦν τὰ παρόντα τὸ ἦθος τοῦ φίλου; discussed in detail by Papaioannou, "Letter-writing", p. 192.

[44] On the revival of rhetorical theory in the eleventh century, Magdalino, "From 'Encyclopedism' to 'Humanism'"; Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*; for antiquity, Hall, "Lawcourt Dramas"; Duncan, *Performance and Identity*, pp. 58-89.

[45] Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1395b12-19 [2.21.16] and 1408a25-36 [3.7.6-7], ed. Kassel, pp. 121, 159-60; cf. also 1356a1-13 [1.2.3-4], pp. 9-10. Aphthonios, *Progymnasmata,* 11.1, ed. and trans. Patillon, p. 144, l. 1-2; John Sikeliotes, *Commentary on Hermogenes*, ed. Walz, vol. 6, p. 482, l. 21 - p. 483, l. 1; Maximos Planoudes, *Commentary on Hermogenes*, ed. Walz, vol. 5, p. 527, l. 11-12. See also Demetrios, *On Style*, §§ 223-35, ed. and trans. Chiron, pp. 63-66, trans. Innes, pp. 477-83.

[46] Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, p. 107-13; Gaul, "Rising Elites and Institutionalization", pp. 259-69; Nilsson, *Raconter Byzance*, pp. 145-52. See also Amato/Schamps, *Ethopoiia*.

[47] I.e., the imperial dais.

[48] Compare above at n. 39, where Psellos likened his performance to "tragical discourse" (τραγικῆς … διαλέ-ξεως).

emperor's presence] without suitable performance or perish for making the performance apparent.[49]

Epistolary/rhetorical character -- almost reflecting the modern sociological notion of habitus -- served as a means of social distinction as well as a lubricant among the elites, as when Gregoras and Magistros struck an epistolary connection around the passage quoted above,[50] they felt comfortable in doing so as shared learning implied shared habitus.[51] Not least that this notion of character made audible is closely tied into the metaphor of the letter as an "image of the soul",[52] which Choumnos hinted at, too. This image beautifully captures the closeness and presence letters were expected to create with the audience: on her deathbed Andrew Libadenos's mother kissed the letters he had sent from his journeys and asked to be buried with some of them.[53] And yet for all this emphasis on character and plausibility, an audience did not expect that the *ethos* underlying a rhetorical composition would necessarily proclaim the truth: Theodore Metochites was well aware of the constraints that kept a man from speaking his mind openly.[54]

We have already seen that a "theatrical" setting was immediate and, frequently, intimate as there was no stage, nor was it possible to dim lights; the mise-en-scène -- with the author-orator placed "in the middle" -- invited acoustic and gestural interaction between performer and audience on the one hand, and among members of the audience over and around the performer, to the latter's advantage or disadvantage, on the other.[55] The élite nature of rhetorical production and performance entailed that today's author would be tomorrow's listener, and vice-versa, to the effect that "the readership of Byzantine literature was no wider than its audience, an audience comprising the sum of all contemporary *theatra*".[56] In a striking passage, Psellos discusses the reinvigorating effect of writing that comes from

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[49] Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 229, eds. Kurtz/Drexl, p. 272, l. 10-13; p. 273, l. 21-24, 28-30: οὐκ οἶδα πότερον αὐτὸς ἐμαυτῷ γίνομαι αἴτιος τοῦ δέχεσθαι παρὰ σοῦ, τῆς ἱερᾶς ἐμοὶ κεφαλῆς, τοιαύτας ἐπιστολὰς ἢ σὺ καὶ τὸ σὸν ἦθος ὑπὸ τῶν πραγμάτων μεταβληθέν …· οὐδενὶ γὰρ πώποτε τῶν πάντων ἀνδρῶν ἐγὼ ἐντετύχηκα, καὶ μάλιστα τῶν φιλοσοφεῖν ἐσπουδακότων, οἷος δὴ σὺ τὸ ἦθος σεμνὸς καὶ Σωκρατικὸς καὶ οὔτε κοινὸς ἄγαν οὔτε μόνος εἰρωνικός, ἀλλ' ἀμφοτέρωθεν κεκραμένος καὶ τὴν ἁρμονίαν τῆς ψυχῆς δικαιότατος … σὺ δὲ εἰσεληλυθὼς ἐνταῦθα καὶ τοῦ βήματος ἐντὸς γεγονὼς δέσμησον τὰς ὀφρῦς καὶ τὸ ἦθος ἀλλοίωσον καὶ ὑποθέσεις τοῖς λόγοις μὴ ὑπόβαλε τὰ τῶν ἐπηρειῶν, τὰ τῶν ἀπαιτήσεων, ὡς ἠνίασαι καὶ ἕτοιμος φυγεῖν τὴν μητρόπολιν … ὁρᾷς, ὅπως πόρρω σε τῆς σκηνῆς ὁ τραγῳδὸς ἐγὼ σχηματίζω καὶ διαπλάττω, φοβούμενος μή πως ἀνυπόκριτος ἔλθῃς ἢ διαφθείρῃς φανεὶς τὴν ὑπόκρισιν. See also Jeffreys/Lauxtermann, *Letters of Michael Psellos*, pp. 275-76.

[50] See above at n. 29.

[51] Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, pp. 39-46 and passim; Riehle, "Epistolography, Social Exchange".

[52] Karlsson, *Idéologie et cérémonial*, pp. 94-96; Riehle, "Epistolary Voices"; the idea is already present in Demetrios, *On Style*, § 227, ed. and trans. Chiron, p. 64.

[53] Andrew Libadenos, *Geographical Description*, ed. Lampsides, p. 56, l. 3-11; I owe this passage to Annika Asp-Talwar.

[54] Theodore Metochites, *Essays*, no. 9, ed. Hult, pp. 88-95. For a discussion Gaul, *Thomas Magistros*, pp. 38-39.

[55] Korenjak, *Publikum und Redner*, pp. 68-149.

[56] Mullett, "Aristocracy and Patronage", pp. 179-80, quote on p. 180.

intimacy with a specific audience, and testifies to intellectual as well as physical interaction: inspiration on the one hand, visible applause etc. on the other. The passage seems to assume the author's physical presence, but forms part of a letter to Constantine, the nephew of Michael Keroularios:

> If indeed the listener strengthens the power of the one displaying the beauty of his words, how could the rhetor's display not increase accordingly? When I am in the middle of a large *theatron*, as I exhibit theatrically the beauty of my words, busy with the harmonious composition of the parts of speech, my rhythm is patterned in this or that fashion after the ears and gestures of my listeners, whether idle or aroused and receptive.[57] When I create my speech with you as a listener, something more happens to me: I become inspired, I am raised with the winged figure of your soul, your signifying look and joyous smile, I display more graceful charms in response to your innate and unpretentious ones.[58]

Elsewhere, in his unique praise of the *anagnostes* John Kroustoulas, Psellos described how skillful reading attracted a crowd and discussed its effects on the audience.[59] Typical physical reactions an audience was expected to display could be gauged from Libanios's letter quoted at the outset, which ranged from blushing via paling and jumping to stooping.[60] It seems that practices of applauding have not changed much through the centuries: clapping one's hands, stamping one's feet, and jumping up from one's seat remained the preferred methods of expressing appreciation.[61] As Theodore Metochites famously alleged against Nikephoros Choumnos:

> You convoke *theatra* for your own sake, calling together men of presently great reputation, who listen to your ever so great wisdom and your [intellectual] prowess and over-boldness against Plato and those other men of old with great names. And you yourself sit amidst those men [amidst your own *theatron*], and while your texts are being read, you indulge in orgiastic celebration and you applaud [your own texts]

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[57] On the role of voice vs. gestures in middle Byzantine performance culture see Gaul, "Voicing and Gesturing Emotions".

[58] Michael Psellos, *Letters*, no. 85, ed. Sathas, pp. 324-25 (trans. Papaioannou, *Michael Psellos*, p. 228): εἰ δὲ καὶ τῷ ἐπιδεικνυμένῳ τὴν ὥραν τοῦ λόγου ὁ ἀκροατὴς ἐπιρωννύει τὴν δύναμιν, πῶς οὐχὶ μᾶλλον ἡ ἐπίδειξις κατὰ λόγον χωρήσει τῷ ῥήτορι; ἔγωγ' οὖν ἐν μέσῳ θεάτρου πολλοῦ, αὐτὸ δὴ τοῦτο θεατρίζων τὸ κάλλος τῶν λέξεων, καὶ περὶ τὴν ἐμμελῆ συνθήκην τῶν μερῶν τοῦ λόγου πραγματευόμενος, πρὸς τὰ τῶν ἀκροατῶν ὦτα καὶ σχήματα, εἴτε κατερραθυμημένα εἴη, εἴτε διεγηγερμένα καὶ δόκιμα, οὕτως ἐκείνως ῥυθμίζομαι· ὑπὸ σοὶ δὲ μᾶλλον ἀκροατῇ τοὺς λόγους ποιούμενος, ἔνθους τε γίνομαι, καὶ συνεπαίρομαί σοι τῷ ἐπτερωμένῳ σχήματι τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τῷ σημαίνοντί σοι τοῦ βλέμματος, καὶ τῷ γεγηθότι τοῦ μειδιάματος, καὶ ταῖς ἐμφύτοις καὶ ἀπροσποιήτοις χάρισι χαριεστέρας σοι καὶ αὐτὸς τὰς τῶν λόγων ἀνταποδείκνυμι χάριτας.

[59] Psellos, *Orations*, no. 37, ed. Littlewood, pp. 137-51; trans. Papaioannou in Barber/Papaioannou, *Psellos on Literature and Art*, pp. 218-44; see Gaul, "Voicing and Gesturing Emotions".

[60] See above at n. 1.

[61] Korenjak, *Publikum und Redner*, pp. 87-95; Gaul, "Performative Reading".

> with manifold unpleasant gestures, soon jumping up from your stool, soon collapsing and contracting [on it, performing] all [possible] gestures and bending of your head and neck, and manifold twisting and turnings of your body, going mad and offering [many] occasions of laughter and much to talk about to the listeners and spectators, when they would later leave your *theatron*.[62]

This passage comes from the context of polemics and must be read *cum grano salis*, but it acutely conveys the thin line between acceptable und unacceptable gesturing. On a different note, one would like to know if the late antique ceremonial upon arrival of an (official) letter from the emperor -- treated as if it were the emperor's sacred person himself -- was still observed in later Byzantine periods; the sources remain silent on the issue, yet there is no doubt that various Byzantine emperors corresponded in various formats with their subjects, although few imperial letters survive.[63]

To return finally to the quote from Manuel II Palaiologos's letter which opened this chapter,[64] the passage given at the outset continues as follows:

> But while the others seemed to be expressing their wonderment, I seemed to be the only one who was not doing so. Someone asked me how it could be possible that among the entire group I alone appeared unaffected, that is, uninspired and lacking in admiration. "I too am greatly impressed", I replied, "for I cannot help being thoroughly amazed, not because a noble father brings forth noble children", referring to you and your writings, "but because the rest of you marvel at this as though you had unexpectedly come across something new". This is what I said, and I seemed to hit the mark, inasmuch as it brought the group to admire the very man whom I wanted to be admired.[65]

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[62] Theodore Metochites, *Orations*, no. 14, § 27, ed. Ševčenko, *Études sur la polémique*, p. 253, l. 1-11: καὶ θέατρα συγκαλεῖς ἑαυτῷ καὶ τοὺς νῦν ἐλλογίμους, ἀκροασαμένους τῆς σῆς μεγίστης σοφίας καὶ κράτους καὶ τόλμης κατὰ Πλάτωνος καὶ τῶν παλαιῶν ἐκείνων μεγαλωνύμων ἀνδρῶν· καὶ μέσος προκαθήμενος, *ἀναγινωσκομένων τῶν σῶν*, ὀργιάζεις καὶ ἐπικροτεῖς παντοίοις ἀηδίας σχήμασι, νῦν μὲν ἀναπηδῶν τοῦ σκίμποδος, νῦν δὲ συμπίπτων καὶ συνιζάνων καὶ χειρονομίαις πάσαις καὶ κεφαλῆς κλίσεσι καὶ αὐχένος, καὶ στροφαῖς καὶ ἀντιστροφαῖς παντοίαις τοῦ σώματος, ἐξοιστρούμενος καὶ γέλωτος ἀφορμὰς καὶ πλείστην διατριβὴν τοῖς λόγοις ἔπειθ᾽ ὕστερον ἐξιοῦσιν ἀπὸ σοῦ τοῖς ἀκροαταῖς τε καὶ θεαταῖς παρέχων.

[63] Elm, *Sons of Hellenism*, pp. 69-70; Matthews, *Laying Down*, pp. 186-99; see also Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, pp. 73-117; Price, *Rituals*, pp. 87-100; and Chapter 7 this volume.

[64] See above at n. 3.

[65] Manuel II Palaiologos, *Letters*, no. 9, ed. and trans. Dennis, pp. 24-25, l. 11-19: εἷς δὲ μόνος αὐτὸς ἐν θαυμάζουσιν οὐ τοῦτ᾽ ἐφάνην ποιῶν, καί τινος ἐρομένου τί δήποθ᾽ ἂν εἴη τὸ μόνον μὲ τῶν πάντων ποιοῦν μὴ ταὐτὰ τοῖς ἅπασι πάσχειν· ἔνθουν λέγω καθορᾶσθαι καὶ ἐκπλήξεως γέμοντα. "ἐκπλήττομαί γε", ἔφην, "κἀγώ· δεῖ μὲ γὰρ τῷ ὄντι ἐκπλήξει συνέχεσθαι, οὐχ ὡς γενναῖος γενναίους τέκοι παῖδας πατήρ" -- σὲ δὴ λέγων καὶ ἅπερ γράφεις -- »ἀλλ᾽ ὅθ᾽ ὑμεῖς ἀξιοῦτε τουτὶ θαυμάζειν ὡς δὴ παρὰ προσδοκίαν ἰδόντες τι καινόν.« ταῦτ᾽ ἔφην ἐγὼ καὶ ἔδοξά τι λέγειν, ἀνθ᾽ ὧν θαυμάζειν μᾶλλον τούτοις ἐπήει ὃν θαυμάζεσθαι ἐβουλόμην.

This amply demonstrates how Manuel Palaiologos managed to bestow cultural capital on the candidate of his choice, the author of the letter as opposed to the latter's teacher who read the letter publicly in the emperor's *theatron*. One may assume similar strategies at play on other occasions as well, or more overt statements of approval or, indeed, disapproval: for performances in the *theatron* could fail, resulting in a loss of cultural capital for the performer.[66] However, such situations are rather not attested in epistolographical exchanges which focus on congratulating an author on the success of his letter.

The Byzantine rhetorical *theatron* remained a fluid concept: originating from its spatial association with theatrical buildings in late antiquity, the act of public performance before an audience became the defining criterion now bestowing the name on a variety of occasions and locations. These could ranged from playful performances within a circle of friends to orations before the emperor, as long as a performer "stepped into the middle" and, thus, a recognizably "theatrical" situation arose.

The Byzantine rhetorical *theatron* remained a fluid concept. Starting as a spatial association in late antiquity, the act of public performance before of an audience became the defining criterion, which led to the name being applied to a variety of occasions and locations. These could range from playful performances within a circle of friends, to formal orations before the emperor. As long as a performer "stepped into the middle" and created a recognizably "theatrical" situation, it could be called a rhetorical *theatron*. Once in the *theatron*, the letter was expected to transmit -- in addition to gifts and the intellectual joy of solving rhetorical puzzles -- the absent author's voice, character, and soul, with Byzantine epistolographers purposely blurring the line between the author's and the reader's voice, depending on the specific context. However, in the world of the Byzantine *theatron*, each such epistolary display of character also resulted in a judgement by the audience and patrons.

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Abstract

The first part of this chapter offers a short history of the practice of literary *theatron*, or "recital". The term is first attested in late antiquity, when theatres and other theatre-style buildings were used for the public performance of letters. It is not attested during the early middle Byzantine period. Once literary *theatra* reappeared in the eleventh century, the term metonymically seems to have provided the name for the apparently more flexible venues in which such gatherings were convened in that period. In the second part, the chapter traces the fate of a letter once it came into a *theatron* by looking at four aspects in particular: How was the letter given a voice? What did audiences expect in a letter thus "voiced"? Which reaction was, in turn, expected from the audience? And to what degree, finally, was all this influenced by social hierarchy?

Keywords

Discipline categories: Byzantine world; Literature - Prose; Social History

Geographical categories: Eastern Mediterranean

Chronological categories: 5th-15th centuries

Other: *Theatron*; Performance; Public reading; Rhetorical character/*ethos*; Voice; Patron/patroness; Patronage; Cultural *or* social capital; Letter carrier *or* bearer; In the middle/into the middle as key terms denoting *theatre*